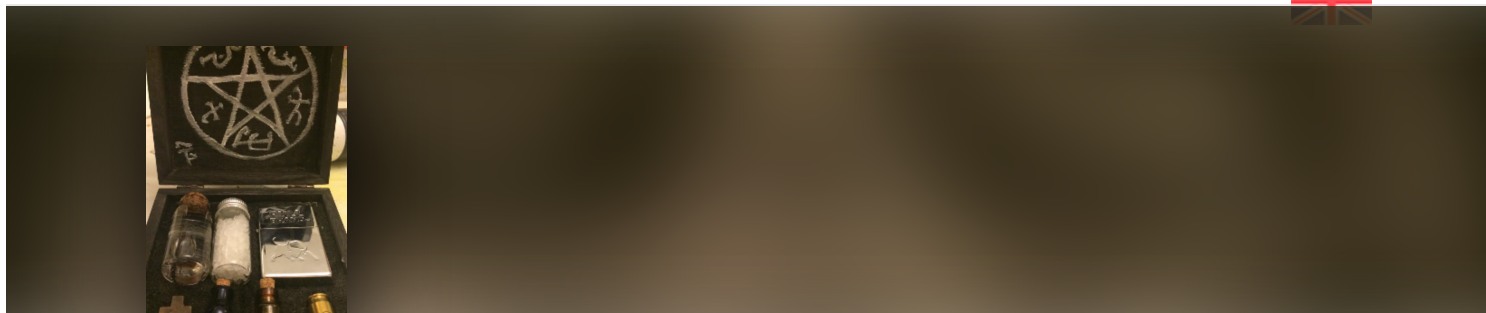




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The Guardians



paranormal

apocalyptic

mystery

220 5 17

Chapter 1 by Sheygull

"What if I told you the world we live in is nothing but a lie? What if I told the stories they told you as a child are true? Werewolves, vampires, ghosts, boogiemens, everything is real.

Of course you would say something like "Yeah, sure. The why I've never saw a werewolf before?" That's because there are people like me, people that take care of humanity, protect them from the dangers that lurk in the dark hidden from the regular human.

We call ourselves "Guardians". We've been around since the dark ages, disguised as priests, archeologist, policemen and so.

Why am I telling you this? Because a war will start soon and I'm afraid for the first time in a long time. I feel we will need a lot of help.

Find Roger Fields. He's always at the Twilight Cafe at 7 pm. He will guide you.

Good luck."

I found this letter in my apartment the night of the 7th of June after a long working day. The next morning they found my neighbor dead. They said, Now I know it wasn't a psycho that killed him, and I know I was right. I was a Guardian.

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That was the beginning of it all. The start of a new life.

Chapter 2 by Brittany Way



It was around 6 pm already and the policemen were asking me all sorts of questions about what happened. I know I needed to get to the Twilight Cafe before 7 pm so I could see Roger Fields. I know everything from my childhood is now real and I need a better explanation.

I stroll away from all the questions and get inside my car and try to start it, but nothing was happening... I looked at all of the gauges and I was out of gas. 'I need to stop doing this... This is the third time this month this has happened..' I thought to myself. I got out of the car and started running to the Twilight Cafe because it was only a couple of blocks away from where I am living. Everything I ran past I jumped at because I know the monsters are real now.

A minute before 7 pm I opened the door to the cafe and started looking around at all of the familiar faces. I looked at my watch and right when it turned 7 pm an unfamiliar face came into the door. 'This has to be Roger Fields...' I walked over to him and stuck out my hand for a handshake to introduce myself. All that was going through my mind was 'how can these monster be real? And since they are real are they coming after me next? Do I have to become a 'Guardian' myself to protect me and the people I love?...'

Chapter 3 by RF



"Roger?" I asked. The bespectacled, frumpy, middle-aged man blinked back at me.

"Excuse me?" he replied.

"Sorry," I said, realizing how my eagerness to figure out what was happening had made me hasty. "But are you Roger Fielding?"

He chuckled good-naturedly. "No. Abel. Abel Cavendish. Though I'm often told I don't look like an Abel. Which is just mean, when you think about it." He chuckled at himself absentmindedly for a moment before seeming to remember I was standing in front of him. "As in not Abel. Or unable. Never mind. I look like a Roger though, do I?"

"No, sorry, I was supposed to meet someone else. I'll be right back, maybe."

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"Ah, Not Roger Fielding, is he?"

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"That's him! You know him? Is he here?"

"I don't know him to look at," he smiled apologetically, "only by reputation."

"Oh?" I asked eagerly, "And what's his reputation?"

"Well..." said the man thoughtfully. He blinked, a faraway look crept into his eyes and he made a face like he tasted something salty when he expected sweet. Then he put the brakes on his thoughts and gave me a once-over. "That of a hard man to find. And he's true to it, apparently. There's a bit of urgency about this, is there? Are you in some kind of trouble, dear?" He must have seen the answer written on my face. "The kind of trouble that Roger Fielding can help with?"

He stared at me searchingly and I tried not to stare back in the same manner. Was this actually Roger Fielding? Testing me? Or was I about to spill the beans to a stranger? I held my tongue and changed course: "No. Just looking to meet a friend of a friend. He comes here, right? Usually at 7, or so I am told..."

"Ah, well then young lady, you know more than I, it seems. But I am a regular here. If I happen to see this Roger fellow, I can pass along your details, if you like. What's your name?"

"Well," I began. What to say? If Abel is really Roger being careful about who he talks to, this is my opportunity to meet him. If not, and Roger doesn't show, Abel could be a connection. But I don't know Roger much less Able. How crazy will I sound if I say that my murdered neighbor, Mrs. Portnoy, claimed to be part of a group who tasked themselves with defending the world against creatures of legend? And that she told me to find Roger Fielding to, what? Help her? A little late for that. Help me? Do what, not die...?

The police think that Mrs. Portnoy was the victim of an interrupted burglary turned violent. On the same day I found a letter from her slipped under my door when I got home? I don't think so. She must have known someone — or something — was coming for her. And felt so poorly about her survival prospects that she thought the best thing to do was pass on a plea for me to locate someone she thought could help tip the scales of the fight she was fighting. Whatever that

entails... At any rate, if there's any chance that whatever came for her — deluded human or other — if there's any chance it can be helped, that's the deciding factor.

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"My name is Abigail and my neighbor Mrs. Portnoy was murdered today the police think it was a burglary gone wrong but I don't think so because she thinks there're monsters - " I breathed deep. My hands were shaking. It felt good to share what happened, say it out loud. But I also hadn't really processed her death and I wasn't even sure what I believed.

"Well. Abigail, you poor thing." Able's face lost some of its levity and he seemed to age a bit in front of me. He sighed and gave me a troubled smile. "You know, I may not be the man you're looking for, but I might be the man you've found." He gestured to a nearby open table. "What's more, I'm a good listener. Why don't we have a seat and you tell me exactly what's going on. Between the both of us we can probably shoulder your burden."

As I moved towards the table it occurred to me that the usually boisterous cafe seemed unusually quiet. Not silent, by any means. But the music seemed a little quieter and nearby conversations seemed a little less boisterous. I looked around Twilight. General movement seemed minimal and I felt, now that I was paying attention to the little indications, that people had been listening in on Able's and my interaction. If not actually observing us out of the corner of their eyes. If only because they were so pointedly not looking at us right now.

Except for the barista, who was staring right at me. And while I might have imagined the cafe crowd's behavior, there was no question that the Twilight barista, a disheveled guy with a beard who has monosyllabically served me coffees for I don't know how long, was actually mad-dogging me. As in, he looked like he wanted throttle me. But after taking a quick glance behind me — he had to be looking at someone else, right? — and looking back, he was looking down at the drink he was making. My imagination. Abel hadn't seemed to notice anyway, neither the general atmosphere nor the barista. I chalked it off to nerves and was about to sit in the chair Abel proffered when I heard my name yelled across the cafe.

"Abigail?!" yelled the Barista, looking around the cafe. Which somehow suddenly seemed to be holding its collective breath, as if an actor in a play had forgotten his line. "Is there an Abigail here?" He held up a phone in his hand and seemed to be looking everywhere but at me. I raised my hand and caught his attention. He nodded at me. I felt the crowd's eyes move back and forth

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My mother was in the Philippines, where she spent most of her time. She had zero reason to think I'd be in this cafe at this time. Even if I came here every day at 7PM, my mother would be the last person to know, much less have a reason to call me here. Unless there was some kind of catastrophic emergency with the family businesses that required stateside help and even then I'd be on the bottom of her list of people to call. So while it was;t literally impossible, it was highly unlikely, to say the least, that my mother was on the other end of that phone line. I walked towards the counter to grab the phone, but the barista was moving to the end of the counter so I did as well. But then he backtracked a bit and gestured to the darkness beyond a doorway behind the counter. "You'll probably want a little privacy." He gave me a tight-lipped smile, his bushy brown beard making his face hard to read. He held the phone across the threshold of the doorway. I made my way behind the counter and as I did so I could see Abel in the reflection of the mirror behind the counter. He stared at my back expressionlessly but then our eyes met in the mirror and he gave me a warm smile.

"She says she has something important to tell you. Your mom." The barista gestured impatiently with the phone. I took it and moved into the supply room of the cafe and the barista headed back towards his position behind the espresso machines. "Hello?"

On the other end of the line there was a loud rustling sound followed by silence, then more rustling. As if the caller had dropped the phone and was having a hard time retrieving it. Then, finally: "Listen very carefully. Don't say a word, just listen." It was definitely not my mother. It was a man's voice. In fact -

I leaned out of the storage room and peeked behind the counter. As I suspected, the bearded barista was crouched on the ground with a cell phone pressed to his mouth. He looked scared. Out on the floor, Abel was looking at my quizzically. I gave him a thumbs up and popped back into the storage room.

"What the hell? Are to trying to get me killed? Months I've spent infiltrating this place and you just blunder in here one evening and blow my cover all over the place. You have no idea what you're doing or who you're messing with, that's painfully obvious. You need to get out of here

Now!"

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"I'm not messing with any

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It's me off

"No help here, only trouble. Which you've just complicated immeasurably. And now I need to repair the damage. And you need to leave. If you want to live to see tomorrow, you'll head down the stairs behind you and exit through the cellar. Now. Get out and don't come back." And with that he hung up. I stood there in shock for a minute, the phone still pressed against my face, my breath shallow. I don't often think such thoughts but there's nothing in the world I would have liked more than for that to have been a call from my mother.

I sighed, placed the phone down and walked farther into the storage room. Beyond a shelving unit packed high with various supplies was a closed door. And on the other side of that was a flight of stairs down into darkness. I flicked the light switch and the staircase became slightly less dark. Time to cut your losses, Abigail, I thought to myself. Missed opportunity, near-fatality, or skipping out on a crazy-person feud, maybe I'll never know. But there's so much more than meets the eye here I've got no perspective. Better to just make myself scarce for a while.

I was halfway down the stairs when the screaming started. There was angry hollering, men's raised voices, followed by screaming. The sound of screaming men and screaming something else. A kind of animal noise but like nothing I've ever heard before. I stood frozen on the stairs, transfixed by the intense noise. The the floor above me exploded.

Chapter 4 by LitulDoUNo



I ran for my life. Debris rained down the ceiling. I quickly exited the cafe and ran down the street. Even if I never find this Roger Fields. Hopefully I'll intercept him.

I headed straight for the grocery store, shadows jumping out at me. I didn't acknowledge any of them, too busy with my current mission.

It didn't take long for me to run through the parking lot and into the store. Hundreds of people seemed to be watching me. Humans or monsters, it made me uncomfortable.

When I was sure I was safe in aisle 7, I looked back. I saw Abel. He managed to follow me.

Even if we were somewhat friends, I didn't trust him. We've just met. His stalkerish motives did not make him any less sketchy.

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I walked around the store. I need, but would not buy. NO I was not going to STEAL them. I was just going to walk around with them, and maybe put

them all back when I'm finished. It was when I was in the poultry section, did I feel a tap on my shoulder.

"Hi, Abigail", it was Abel.

I nearly dropped the chicken I was holding. "Abel what-"

"I know what you're thinking, but we can't stop here. They're after us", Abel constantly looked around as he said this.

"Who?", I asked.

"The monsters", he answered and grabbed my hand. "We need to leave now!"

And with that we ran out of the store.

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